



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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Changes in U.S.-European Union organic trade open opportunities

OLYMPIA – Organic growers and processors in Washington should benefit from increased sales to the European Union (EU) now that the EU and the United States are operating under a new organic equivalency partnership that went into effect June 1.

“It should be a very good thing for our organic businesses,” WSDA Director Dan Newhouse said. “Washington features one of the premier organic industries in the U.S. and the new arrangement to streamline organic trade with Europe will reduce costs for our organic exporters and make our organic foods and ingredients more available to the 27 countries that make up the European Union.

“While most of Washington’s organic trade focuses on Canada and Pacific Rim nations, we’ve been active in Europe as well. So this innovative arrangement is very exciting as organic production is a vital component of Washington’s diverse agriculture.”

Previously, producers and companies that wanted to trade on both sides of the Atlantic had to obtain separate certifications to two standards, resulting in a double set of fees, inspections and paperwork. The United States signed a similar partnership with Canada in 2009. Additional organic equivalency arrangement conversations have been held with South Korea, Taiwan and Japan, according to a USDA [news release](#).

U.S. and EU organic standards have slight differences; however both sides determined that their programs were equivalent, allowing the agreement to go ahead.

To comply with the new agreement, U.S. apples and pears must be produced without antibiotics, products must travel with an EU import certificate completed by a USDA-accredited certifying agent and products must be either produced within the U.S. or have had final processing and packaging occur within the U.S. Potential exporters may visit WSDA's [International Markets page](#) and a [Guide to International Organic Markets](#) for details on how exported organic products are evaluated by staff.

American sales of organic products to the EU are expected to grow substantially within the first few years of the new arrangement.

WSDA’s Organic Food Program, which is accredited by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, upholds the integrity of the organic label through certification and inspection of organic crops, livestock producers, processors, handlers and retailers. The program is the oldest and largest state organic certification agency in the U.S.

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In 2011, WSDA certified more than 90,000 acres of crops as organic, including forage, tree fruits, vegetables, herbs, grains, beans and oilseeds. WSDA certifies more than 25 dairies as organic in Washington, bringing premium prices to farmers in that sector and others.

WSDA's program is entirely fee-funded. Employees certify more than 1,100 organic clients and register 750 material inputs for organic production. A list of WSDA certified operations, as well as information about organic certification, is posted [online](#).

Washington State University posts stats on organic industry

Sales of Washington's organically grown products exceed \$244 million.

[Statistics](#) regarding the status of the organic food industry in Washington show vibrant growth with 64,000 acres certified organic in 2006 and a peak of 108,000 acres in 2009. In 2011, the top three organic commodities by acreage were: organic forage (30%); tree fruit (21%); and vegetables (17%). Sixty-four percent of the state's 730 certified organic farms are located in Eastern Washington.

In 2010, the latest figures available, Grant, Benton and Walla Walla counties were the top three farmgate sales counties for organic commodities. The top three counties in Western Washington were Skagit, Pierce and King.

Consumers should check for certified organic label

Whether shopping at a farmers market, grocery store, on-farm store or participating in a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) share, consumers should look for a U.S. Department of Agriculture organic label, certifier seal or ask to see an organic certificate.

Brenda Book, manager of WSDA's Organic Food Program, notes these measures provide evidence that the product was grown on farms that are inspected to ensure compliance with nationwide organic standards. For a product to be labeled organic, certified organic farmers must use organic seeds and refrain from using most synthetic pesticides and fertilizers. Organic feed is required for livestock and animals must be allowed outside on a regular basis.

Book said that small farm operations that sell less than \$5,000 of agriculture products a year can use the label if following organic rules, but certification is optional to keep costs down.

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